

Message Text

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44

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 AID-05 OMB-01 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 /075 W

----- 084785

R 020955Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6962

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

EC BRUSSELS 282

USMISSION NATO

DIA

USDOCOSOUTH

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE VALLETTA 1022

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, MT, AG, LY

SUBJ: MINTOFF RETURNS FROM ALGIERS VIA TRIPOLI AND INTERJECTS
HIS DISCUSSIONS INTO THE MALTESE POLITICAL CAMPAIGN

REF: VALLETTA 1004 (NOTAL), 1014(NOTAL); ALGIERS 2123(NOTAL);
TRIPOLI 1165(NOTAL)

1. PRIME MINISTER MINTOFF COMPLETED HIS OVERNIGHT WHIRLWIND
TOUR OF ALGIERS AND TRIPOLI BY PLUNGING INTO A LABOR PARTY
POLITICAL MEETING AT MARSA THE EVENING OF AUGUST 31, JUST A
FEW HOURS AFTER HIS RETURN TO MALTA. PLAYING THE ROLE OF
THE "ONE WHO KNOWS ALL" TO THE HILT, MINTOFF ENDED HIS
OVERSEAS ELECTIONEERING JUNKET BY BLATANTLY INTERJECTING
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THE "SUPPORT" HE HAD JUST "OBTAINED" FROM BOUMEDIENE

AND QADHAFI INTO THE THICK OF THE MALTESE POLITICAL CAMPAIGN. IT WAS TO BE EXPECTED, BUT EVEN FOR MINTOFF THIS WAS A RATHER BOLD (AND PERHAPS RISKY) EXERCISE IN POLITICAL GAMESMANSHIP.

2. COINCIDENT WITH THE MALTESE DELEGATION'S RETURN, THE GOM DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION RELEASED THE TEXT OF THE JOINT COMMUNIQUE AGREED TO WITH THE ALGERIANS, AS WELL AS A BRIEF "NOTE" ON MINTOFF'S SUBSEQUENT MEETING WITH QADHAFI AND JALLUD. IN SUBSTANCE, THE MALTESE-ALGERIAN COMMUNIQUE CONSTITUTES A FULSOME ENDORSEMENT OF MINTOFF'S PET SCHEME FOR SECURITY AND ECONOMIC "GUARANTEES" FOR MALTA AFTER 1979 FROM NEIGHBORING "FRIENDLY" GOVERNMENTS, AS WELL AS PAYING LIP SERVICE TO MINTOFF'S OBSESSION WITH TURNING THE MEDITERRANEAN INTO A "SEA OF PEACE". IN RETURN, MINTOFF PAID HIS DUES IN THE COMMUNIQUE BY DENOUNCING ISRAELI OCCUPATION OF "PALESTINIAN TERRITORY", BY EXPRESSING "DEEP CONCERN" AT THE CONTINUING CONFLICT IN LEBANON, AND BY REAFFIRMING SUPPORT FOR THOSE AFRICAN PEOPLES "STILL FIGHTING FOR THEIR NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE". THE GOM PRESS RELEASE ON THE MEETING IN TRIPOLI "TOOK NOTE" OF THE FACT THAT THERE IS ONLY ONE ISSUE "STILL UNRESOLVED" BETWEEN MALTA AND LIBYA, "THE DIVIDING LINE BETWEEN THE CONTINENTAL SHELVES OF THE TWO COUNTRIES". THE GOM RELEASE STATES THAT MINTOFF WAS ASSURED, "NOW THAT PRIME MINISTER JALLUD HAS RETURNED TO LIBYA AND CAN DEAL WITH THE WORK AT HOME" (SIC), THE AGREEMENT (ON THE MEDIAN LINE DISPUTE) "WILL BE RATIFIED SOON".

3. HOWEVER, MINTOFF WAS JUST WARMING UP WITH THESE DOCUMENTS. BY THE TIME HE REACHED THE LABOR PARTY RALLY ON AUGUST 31, HE WAS READY WITH MUCH MORE IMPORTANT "NEWS" FOR THE MALTESE ELECTORATE. AFTER BRIEF LAUDATORY REMARKS ABOUT ALL OF THE ASSISTANCE THAT MALTA WOULD BE OBTAINING FROM ALGERIA IF (BUT ONLY, IF) THE LABOR PARTY IS RE-ELECTED TO POWER, MINTOFF PLUNGED INTO A VERY EXPANSIVE DISCLOSURE OF HIS DISCUSSIONS WITH HIS FAVORITE ARAB LEADER, QADHAFI (HE HARDLY MENTIONED JALLUD).

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4. MINTOFF CLAIMED THAT HE BROUGHT BACK A "WARNING" FROM QADHAFI FOR THE MALTESE: THAT LIBYA WOULD STOP SUPPLYING OIL (AT ANY PRICE) TO MALTA "IF THE NATIONALISTS ARE ELECTED TO POWER AND MALTA BECOMES AN ALLY OF NATO." MINTOFF ADDED THAT QADHAFI ALSO MADE IT CLEAR THAT HE WAS VERY "INTERESTED" IN THE MALTESE POLITICAL SITUATION AND THE CHANCE THAT THE NATIONALISTS MIGHT WIN. MINTOFF SAID QADHAFI WAS "SURPRISED" THAT THE NATIONALISTS WOULD

HAVE ANY SUPPORTERS AFTER EVERYTHING THAT THE LABOR PARTY HAD DONE FOR MALTA OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS.

5. IN RESPONSE, MINTOFF SAID HE ASSURED QADHAFI OF A LABOR VICTORY, AND DISCUSSED WITH HIM TWO OF THE "RIDICULOUS" PROPOSALS WITH WHICH THE NATIONALISTS WERE TRYING TO CONFUSE THE MALTESE VOTERS; THE GRADUAL ABOLISHMENT OF INCOME TAX, AND THE "POUND-FOR-POUND" CAPITAL REPATRIATION SCHEME. MINTOFF STATED THAT QADHAFI WAS "SURPRISED AND AMUSED" BY THESE IDEAS, WONDERING HOW THE NATIONALISTS WOULD OBTAIN MONEY WITHOUT TAXES, AND HOW THE "IMPRACTICAL" REPATRIATION SCHEME COULD EVER WORK. MINTOFF CLOSED BY SAYING THAT QADHAFI CERTAINLY UNDERSTOOD MALTA'S PROBLEMS AND WOULD REMAIN A GOOD FRIEND AND BENEFACTOR OF THE MALTESE IF LABOR REMAINS IN POWER.

6. COMMENT: THIS WAS A TYPICAL MINTOFFIAN PERFORMANCE, BUT ONE WHICH COULD BACKFIRE ON HIM. BY ONCE MORE DRAGGING QADHAFI'S NAME INTO THE MALTESE ELECTION CAMPAIGN, MINTOFF MAY BE TREADING ON DANGEROUS GROUND AS FAR AS THE UNDECIDED MALTESE VOTERS ARE CONCERNED. NERVOUSLY ANXIOUS FOR ENDORSEMENTS FROM OTHER GOVERNMENTS FOR HIS "NON-ALIGNED" AND "PEACE AND SECURITY" PROPOSALS FOR MALTA, MINTOFF HAS HAD TO SETTLE FOR A SECOND RUN-THROUGH WITH QADHAFI ON THESE SUBJECTS AND THE ADDITION OF BOUMEDIENE TO HIS LIST OF "FRIENDS". THERE ARE MANY LOCAL OBSERVERS WHO THINK THAT MINTOFF'S ACKNOWLEDGED LEAD OVER THE NATIONALIST OPPOSITION BEGAN TO ERODE EXACTLY AS A RESULT OF QADHAFI'S VISIT TO MALTA LAST MAY, WHEN THE LIBYAN LEADER'S BLUNT EXPRESSION OF HIS OPINIONS ABOUT MALTA'S FUTURE BROUGHT THE MALTESE FACE-TO-FACE WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF DRIFTING UNDER LIBYAN CONTROL AFTER THE BRITISH DEPART IN 1979. A SECOND DREDGING UP OF THE COLONEL AT THIS LATE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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STAGE IN THE CAMPAIGN COULD WELL HAVE THE OPPOSITE EFFECT THAT MINTOFF INTENDS. IT REMAINS AN UNDISPUTED FACT THAT MOST MALTESE DO NOT LIKE MOST LIBYANS AND ESPECIALLY QADHAFI. JUST ENOUGH VOTERS COULD BE DRIVEN OVER TO THE OPPOSITION BY FEAR OF FUTURE ARAB INFLUENCE IN MALTESE AFFAIRS TO UPSET MINTOFF'S ELECTION BANDWAGON. AND FOR MINTOFF TO STRAIN SO HARD TO PUT WORDS INTO QADHAFI'S MOUTH ABOUT THE NATIONALIST INCOME TAX AND "POUND FOR POUND" SCHEMES INDICATES HOW MUCH THE LABORITES ARE WORRIED ABOUT THE POSSIBLE EFFECT OF THESE ISSUES ON THE VOTERS AS WELL. END COMMENT. WIGGINS

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REPORTS, MINISTERIAL VISITS, PARTY MEETINGS, ELECTION CAMPAIGNS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 02 SEP 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: morefirh
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976VALLET01022
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760333-1087
From: VALLETTA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760995/aaaaddqi.tel
Line Count: 165
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 VALLETTA 1004, 76 ALGIERS 2123
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: morefirh
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 06 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <06 APR 2004 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <06 APR 2004 by morefirh>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MINTOFF RETURNS FROM ALGIERS VIA TRIPOLI AND INTERJECTS HIS DISCUSSIONS INTO THE MALTESE POLITICAL CAMPAIGN
TAGS: PFOR, MT, AG, LY, (MINTOFF, DOMINIC)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006